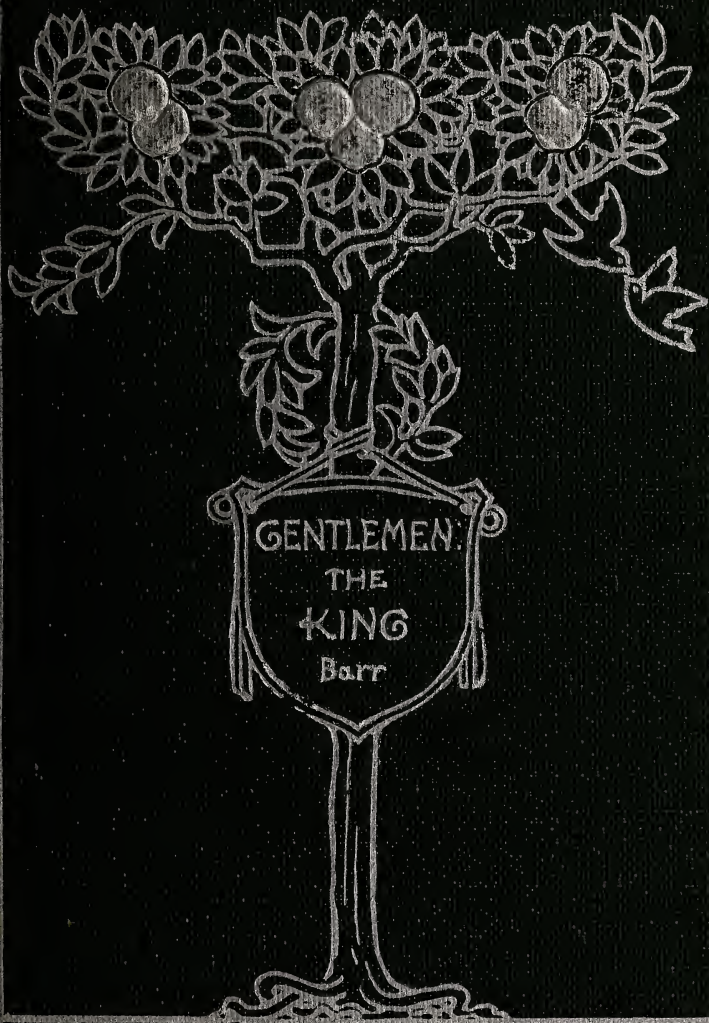


# HALF-HOUR CLASSICS



RB109,168



PURCHASED FOR THE  
*UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY*  
FROM THE  
*HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL*  
*SPECIAL GRANT*  
FOR  
CANADIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH





---

---

GENTLEMEN  
THE KING

---

---



Half Hour Classics  
By  
Modern Masters of Fiction

# GENTLEMEN: THE KING!

By  
ROBERT BARR  
*Author of "Tekla," "The Victors,"*  
*"In the Midst of Alarms," etc.*



NEW YORK  
Frederick A. Stokes Company  
*Publishers*

From  
"THE STRONG ARM."

COPYRIGHT, 1897, 1898, 1899,  
By ROBERT BARR.

---

COPYRIGHT, 1899,  
By FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY.



---

---

## CONTENTS

---

	<i>Page</i>
"GENTLEMEN : THE KING !" . . .	I
THE COUNT'S APOLOGY . . . .	32
COUNT CONRAD'S COURTSHIP . .	80



---

# GENTLEMEN THE KING

---

THE room was large, but with a low ceiling, and at one end of the lengthy, broad apartment stood a gigantic fireplace, in which was heaped a pile of blazing logs, whose light, rather than that of several lanterns hanging from nails along the timbered walls, illuminated the faces of the twenty men who sat within. Heavy timbers, blackened with age and smoke, formed the ceiling. The long, low, diamond-paned window in the middle of the wall opposite the door, had been shuttered as completely as possible, but less care than usual was taken to prevent the light from penetrating into the darkness beyond, for the night was a stormy and tempestuous one, the rain lashing wildly against the hunt-

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

ing châlet, which, in its time, had seen many a merry hunting party gathered under its ample roof.

Every now and then a blast of wind shook the wooden edifice from garret to foundation, causing a puff of smoke to come down the chimney, and the white ashes to scatter in little whirlwinds over the hearth. On the opposite side from the shuttered window was the door, heavily barred. A long, oaken table occupied the centre of the room, and round this in groups, seated and standing, were a score of men, all with swords at their sides; bearing, many of them, that air of careless hauteur which is supposed to be a characteristic of noble birth.

Flagons were scattered upon the table, and a barrel of wine stood in a corner of the room farthest from the fireplace, but it was evident that this was no ordinary drinking party, and

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

that the assemblage was brought about by some high purport, of a nature so serious that it stamped anxiety on every brow. No servants were present, and each man who wished a fresh flagon of wine had to take his measure to the barrel in the corner and fill for himself.

The hunting chalet stood in a wilderness, near the confines of the kingdom of Alluria, twelve leagues from the capital, and was the property of Count Staumn, whose tall, gaunt form stood erect at the head of the table as he silently listened to the discussion which every moment was becoming more and more heated, the principal speaking parts being taken by the obstinate, rough-spoken Baron Brunfels, on the one hand, and the crafty, fox-like ex-Chancellor Steinmetz on the other.

“I tell you,” thundered Baron Brunfels, bringing his fist down on the

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

table, “I will not have the King killed. Such a proposal goes beyond what was intended when we banded ourselves together. The King is a fool, so let him escape like a fool. I am a conspirator, but not an assassin.”

“It is justice rather than assassination,” said the ex-Chancellor suavely, as if his tones were oil and the Baron’s boisterous talk were troubled waters.

“Justice!” cried the Baron, with great contempt. “You have learned that cant word in the Cabinet of the King himself, before he thrust you out. He eternally prates of justice, yet, much as I loathe him, I have no wish to compass his death, either directly or through gabbling of justice.”

“Will you permit me to point out the reason that induces me to believe his continued exemption, and State policy, will not run together?” replied the advocate of the King’s death.

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

“If Rudolph escape, he will take up his abode in a neighbouring territory, and there will inevitably follow plots and counter-plots for his restoration—thus Alluria will be kept in a state of constant turmoil. There will doubtless grow up within the kingdom itself a party sworn to his restoration. We shall thus be involved in difficulties at home and abroad, and all for what? Merely to save the life of a man who is an enemy to each of us. We place thousands of lives in jeopardy, render our own positions insecure, bring continual disquiet upon the State, when all might be avoided by the slitting of one throat, even though that throat belong to the King.”

It was evident that the lawyer's persuasive tone brought many to his side, and the conspirators seemed about evenly divided upon the question of life or death to the King.

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

The Baron was about to break out again with some strenuousness in favour of his own view of the matter, when Count Staumn made a proposition that was eagerly accepted by all save Brunfels himself.

“Argument,” said Count Staumn, “is ever the enemy of good comradeship. Let us settle the point at once and finally, with the dice-box. Baron Brunfels, you are too seasoned a gambler to object to such a mode of terminating a discussion. Steinmetz, the law, of which you are so distinguished a representative, is often compared to a lottery, so you cannot look with disfavour upon a method that is conclusive, and as reasonably fair as the average decision of a judge. Let us throw, therefore, for the life of the King. I, as chairman of this meeting, will be umpire. Single throws and the highest number wins. Baron Brunfels, you will act for the King,



---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

and, if you win, may bestow upon the monarch his life. Chancellor Steinmetz stands for the State. If he wins, then is the King's life forfeit. Gentlemen, are you agreed?”

“Agreed, agreed,” cried the conspirators, with practically unanimous voice.

Baron Brunfels grumbled somewhat, but when the dice-horn was brought, and he heard the rattle of the bones within the leathern cylinder, the light of a gambler's love shone in his eyes, and he made no further protest.

The ex-Chancellor took the dice-box in his hand, and was about to shake, when there came suddenly upon them three stout raps against the door, given apparently with the hilt of a sword. Many not already standing, started to their feet, and nearly all looked one upon another with deep dismay in their glances.

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

The full company of conspirators was present; exactly a score of men knew of the rendezvous, and now the twenty-first man outside was beating the oaken panels. The knocking was repeated, but now accompanied by the words:

“Open, I beg of you.”

Count Staumn left the table and, stealthily as a cat, approached the door.

“Who is there?” he asked.

“A wayfarer, weary and wet, who seeks shelter from the storm.”

“My house is already filled,” spoke up the Count. “I have no room for another.”

“Open the door peacefully,” cried the outlander, “and do not put me to the necessity of forcing it.”

There was a ring of decision in the voice which sent quick pallor to more than one cheek. Ex-Chancellor Steinmetz rose to his feet with chat-

---

## “GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

tering teeth, and terror in his eyes; he seemed to recognise the tones of the invisible speaker. Count Staumn looked over his shoulder at the assemblage with an expression that plainly said: “What am I to do?”

“In the fiend’s name,” hissed Baron Brunfels, taking the precaution, however, to speak scarce above his breath, “if you are so frightened when it comes to a knock at the door, what will it be when the real knocks are upon you. Open, Count, and let the insistent stranger in. Whether he leave the place alive or no, there are twenty men here to answer.”

The Count undid the fastenings and threw back the door. There entered a tall man completely enveloped in a dark cloak that was dripping wet. Drawn over his eyes was a hunter’s hat of felt, with a drooping, bedraggled feather on it.

The door was immediately closed

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

and barred behind him, and the stranger, pausing a moment when confronted by so many inquiring eyes, flung off his cloak, throwing it over the back of a chair; then he removed his hat with a sweep, sending the rain-drops flying. The intriguants gazed at him, speechless, with varying emotions. They saw before them His Majesty, Rudolph, King of Alluria.

If the King had any suspicion of his danger, he gave no token of it. On his smooth, lofty forehead there was no trace of frown, and no sign of fear. His was a manly figure, rather over, than under, six feet in height; not slim and gaunt, like Count Staumn, nor yet stout to excess, like Baron Brunfels. The finger of Time had touched with frost the hair at his temples, and there were threads of white in his pointed beard, but his sweeping moustache was still as black as the night from which he came.

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

His frank, clear, honest eyes swept the company, resting momentarily on each, then he said in a firm voice, without the suspicion of a tremor in it: “Gentlemen, I give you good evening, and although the hospitality of Count Staumn has needed spurring, I lay that not up against him, because I am well aware his apparent reluctance arose through the unexpectedness of my visit; and, if the Count will act as cup-bearer, we will drown all remembrance of a barred door in a flagon of wine, for, to tell truth, gentlemen, I have ridden hard in order to have the pleasure of drinking with you.”

As the King spoke these ominous words, he cast a glance of piercing intensity upon the company, and more than one quailed under it. He strode to the fireplace, spurs jingling as he went, and stood with his back to the fire, spreading out his hands

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

to the blaze. Count Staumn left the bolted door, took an empty flagon from the shelf, filled it at the barrel in the corner, and, with a low bow, presented the brimming measure to the King.

Rudolph held aloft his beaker of Burgundy, and, as he did so, spoke in a loud voice that rang to the beams of the ceiling :

“Gentlemen, I give you a suitable toast. May none here gathered encounter a more pitiless storm than that which is raging without!”

With this he drank off the wine, and, inclining his head slightly to the Count, returned the flagon. No one, save the King, had spoken since he entered. Every word he had uttered seemed charged with double meaning and brought to the suspicious minds of his hearers visions of a trysting place surrounded by troops, and the King standing there, playing with

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

them, as a tiger plays with its victims. His easy confidence appalled them.

When first he came in, several who were seated remained so, but one by one they rose to their feet, with the exception of Baron Brunfels, although he, when the King gave the toast, also stood. It was clear enough their glances of fear were not directed towards the King, but towards Baron Brunfels. Several pairs of eyes beseeched him in silent supplication, but the Baron met none of these glances, for his gaze was fixed upon the King.

Every man present knew the Baron to be reckless of consequences; frankly outspoken, thoroughly a man of the sword, and a despiser of diplomacy. They feared that at any moment he might blurt out the purport of the meeting, and more than one was thankful for the crafty ex-Chancellor's planning, who throughout had

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

insisted there should be no documentary evidence of their designs, either in their houses or on their persons. Some startling rumour must have reached the King's ear to bring him thus unexpectedly upon them.

The anxiety of all was that some one should persuade the King they were merely a storm-besieged hunting party. They trembled in anticipation of Brunfels' open candour, and dreaded the revealing of the real cause of their conference. There was now no chance to warn the Baron; a man who spoke his mind; who never looked an inch beyond his nose, even though his head should roll off in consequence, and if a man does not value his own head, how can he be expected to care for the heads of his neighbours?

“I ask you to be seated,” said the King, with a wave of the hand.

Now, what should that stubborn



---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

fool of a Baron do but remain standing, when all but Rudolph and himself had seated themselves, thus drawing his Majesty's attention directly towards him, and making a colloquy between them well-nigh inevitable. Those next the ex-Chancellor were nudging him, in God's name, to stand also, and open whatever discussion there must ensue between themselves and his Majesty, so that it might be smoothly carried on, but the Chancellor was ashen grey with fear, and his hand trembled on the table.

“My Lord of Brunfels,” said the King, a smile hovering about his lips, “I see that I have interrupted you at your old pleasure of dicing; while requesting you to continue your game as though I had not joined you, may I venture to hope the stakes you play for are not high?”

Every one held his breath, awaiting

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

with deepest concern the reply of the frowning Baron, and when it came growling forth, there was little in it to ease their disquiet.

“Your Majesty,” said Baron Brunfels, “the stakes are the highest that a gambler may play for.”

“You tempt me, Baron, to guess that the hazard is a man’s soul, but I see that your adversary is my worthy ex-Chancellor, and as I should hesitate to impute to him the character of the devil, I am led, therefore, to the conclusion that you play for a human life. Whose life is in the cast, my Lord of Brunfels?”

Before the Baron could reply, ex-Chancellor Steinmetz arose, with some indecision, to his feet. He began in a trembling voice:

“I beg your gracious permission to explain the reason of our gathering —”

“Herr Steinmetz,” cried the King,

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

sternly, “when I desire your interference I shall call for it ; and remember this, Herr Steinmetz ; the man who begins a game must play it to the end, even though he finds luck running against him.”

The ex-Chancellor sat down again, and drew his hand across his damp forehead.

“Your Majesty,” spoke up the Baron, a ring of defiance in his voice, “I speak not for my comrades, but for myself. I begin no game that I fear to finish. We were about to dice in order to discover whether your Majesty should live or die.”

A simultaneous moan seemed to rise from the assembled traitors. The smile returned to the King’s lips.

“Baron,” he said, “I have ever chided myself for loving you, for you were always a bad example to weak and impressionable natures. Even when your overbearing, obstinate in-

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

tolerance compelled me to dismiss you from the command of my army, I could not but admire your sturdy honesty. Had I been able to graft your love of truth upon some of my councillors, what a valuable group of advisers might I have gathered round me. But we have had enough of comedy and now tragedy sets in. Those who are traitors to their ruler must not be surprised if a double traitor is one of their number. Why am I here? Why do two hundred mounted and armed men surround this doomed châlet? Miserable wretches, what have you to say that judgment be not instantly passed upon you?”

“I have this to say,” roared Baron Brunfels, drawing his sword, “that whatever may befall this assemblage, you, at least, shall not live to boast of it.”

The King stood unmoved as Baron

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

Brunfels was about to rush upon him, but Count Staumn and others threw themselves between the Baron and his victim, seeing in the King's words some intimation of mercy to be held out to them, could but actual assault upon his person be prevented.

“My Lord of Brunfels,” said the King, calmly, “sheathe your sword. Your ancestors have often drawn it, but always for, and never against, the occupant of the Throne. Now, gentlemen, hear my decision, and abide faithfully by it. Seat yourselves at the table, ten on each side, the dice-box between you. You shall not be disappointed, but shall play out the game of life and death. Each dices with his opposite. He who throws the higher number escapes. He who throws the lower places his weapons on the empty chair, and stands against yonder wall to be executed for the traitor that he is. Thus half of your

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

company shall live, and the other half seek death with such courage as may be granted them. Do you agree, or shall I give the signal?”

With unanimous voice they agreed, all excepting Baron Brunfels, who spoke not.

“Come, Baron, you and my devoted ex-Chancellor were about to play when I came in. Begin the game.”

“Very well,” replied the Baron nonchalantly. “Steinmetz, the dice-box is near your hand: throw.”

Some one placed the cubes in the leathern cup and handed it to the ex-Chancellor, whose shivering fingers relieved him of the necessity of shaking the box. The dice rolled out on the table; a three, a four, and a one. Those nearest reported the total.

“Eight!” cried the King. “Now, Baron.”

Baron Brunfels carelessly threw the dice into their receptacle, and a mo-

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

ment after the spotted bones clattered on the table.

“Three sixes!” cried the Baron. “Lord, if I only had such luck when I played for money!”

The ex-Chancellor’s eyes were starting from his head, wild with fear.

“We have three throws,” he screamed.

“Not so,” said the King.

“I swear I understood that we were to have three chances,” shrieked Steinmetz, springing from his chair. “But it is all illegal, and not to be borne. I will not have my life diced away to please either King or commons.”

He drew his sword and placed himself in an attitude of defence.

“Seize him; disarm him, and bind him,” commanded the King. “There are enough gentlemen in this company to see that the rules of the game are adhered to.”

Steinmetz, struggling and pleading  
[ 21 ]

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

for mercy, was speedily overpowered and bound; then his captors placed him against the wall, and resumed their seats at the table. The next man to be doomed was Count Staumn. The Count arose from his chair, bowed first to the King and then to the assembled company; drew forth his sword, broke it over his knee, and walked to the wall of the condemned.

The remainder of the fearful contest was carried on in silence, but with great celerity, and before a quarter of an hour was past, ten men had their backs to the wall, while the remaining ten were seated at the table, some on one side, and some on the other.

The men ranged against the wall were downcast, for however bravely a soldier may meet death in hostile encounter, it is a different matter to face it bound and helpless at the hands of an executioner.



---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

A shade of sadness seemed to overspread the countenance of the King, who still occupied the position he had taken at the first, with his back towards the fire.

Baron Brunfels shifted uneasily in his seat, and glanced now and then with compassion at his sentenced comrades. He was first to break the silence.

“Your Majesty,” he said, “I am always loath to see a coward die. The whimpering of your former Chancellor annoys me; therefore will I gladly take his place, and give to him the life and liberty you perhaps design for me, if, in exchange, I have the privilege of speaking my mind regarding you and your precious Kingship.”

“Unbind the valiant Steinmetz,” said the King. “Speak your mind freely, Baron Brunfels.”

The Baron rose, drew sword from scabbard, and placed it on the table.

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

“Your Majesty, backed by brute force,” he began, “has condemned to death ten of your subjects. You have branded us as traitors, and such we are, and so find no fault with your sentence ; merely recognising that you represent, for the time being, the upper hand. You have reminded me that my ancestors fought for yours, and that they never turned their swords against their sovereign. Why, then, have our blades been pointed towards your breast? Because, King Rudolph, you are yourself a traitor. You belong to the ruling class and have turned your back upon your order. You, a king, have made yourself a brother to the demagogue at the street corner ; yearning for the cheap applause of the serf. You have shorn nobility of its privileges, and for what?”

“And for what?” echoed the King with rising voice. “For this ; that

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

the ploughman on the plain may reap what he has sown ; that the shepherd on the hillside may enjoy the increase which comes to his flock ; that taxation may be light ; that my nobles shall deal honestly with the people, and not use their position for thievery and depredation ; that those whom the State honours by appointing to positions of trust shall content themselves with the recompense lawfully given, and refrain from speculation ; that peace and security shall rest on the land ; and that bloodthirsty swash-bucklers shall not go up and down inciting the people to carnage and rapine under the name of patriotism. This is the task I set myself when I came to the Throne. What fault have you to find with the programme, my Lord Baron ? ”

“The simple fault that it is the programme of a fool,” replied the Baron calmly. “In following it you

---

## “GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

have gained the resentment of your nobles, and have not even received the thanks of those pitiable hinds, the ploughman in the valley or the shepherd on the hills. You have impoverished us so that the clowns may have a few more coins with which to muddle in drink their already stupid brains. You are hated in cot and castle alike. You would not stand in your place for a moment, were not an army behind you. Being a fool, you think the common people love honesty, whereas, they only curse that they have not a share in the thieving.”

“The people,” said the King soberly, “have been misled. Their ear has been abused by calumny and falsehood. Had it been possible for me personally to explain to them the good that must ultimately accrue to a land where honesty rules, I am confident I would have had their

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

undivided support, even though my nobles deserted me.”

“Not so, your Majesty ; they would listen to you and cheer you, but when the next orator came among them, promising to divide the moon, and give a share to each, they would gather round his banner and hoot you from the kingdom. What care they for rectitude of government? They see no farther than the shining florin that glitters on their palm. When your nobles were rich, they came to their castles among the people, and scattered their gold with a lavish hand. Little recked the peasants how it was got, so long as they shared it. ‘There,’ they said, ‘the coin comes to us that we have not worked for.’

“But now, with castles deserted, and retainers dismissed, the people have to sweat to wring from traders the reluctant silver, and they cry : ‘Thus it was not in times of old, and

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

this King is the cause of it,' and so they spit upon your name, and shrug their shoulders, when your honesty is mentioned. And now, Rudolph of Alluria, I have done, and I go the more jauntily to my death that I have had fair speech with you before the end.”

The King looked at the company, his eyes veiled with moisture. “I thought,” he said slowly, “until to-night, that I had possessed some qualities at least of a ruler of men. I came here alone among you, and although there are brave men in this assembly, yet I had the ordering of events as I chose to order them, notwithstanding that odds stood a score to one against me. I still venture to think that whatever failures have attended my eight years' rule in Alluria arose from faults of my own, and not through imperfections in the plan, or want of appreciation in the people.

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

“I have now to inform you that if it is disastrous for a King to act without the co-operation of his nobles, it is equally diastrous for them to plot against their leader. I beg to acquaint you with the fact that the insurrection so carefully prepared has broken out prematurely. My capital is in possession of the factions, who are industriously cutting each other's throats to settle which one of two smooth-tongued rascals shall be their President. While you were dicing to settle the fate of an already deposed King, and I was sentencing you to a mythical death, we were all alike being involved in common ruin.

“I have seen to-night more property in flames than all my savings during the last eight years would pay for. I have no horsemen at my back, and have stumbled here blindly, a much bedraggled fugitive, having lost my way in every sense of the phrase.

---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

And so I beg of the hospitality of Count Staumn another flagon of wine, and either a place of shelter for my patient horse, who has been left too long in the storm without, or else direction towards the frontier, whereupon my horse and I will set out to find it.”

“Not towards the frontier!” cried Baron Brunfels, grasping again his sword and holding it aloft, “but towards the capital. We will surround you, and hew for you a way through that fickle mob back to the throne of your ancestors.”

Each man sprang to his weapon and brandished it above his head, while a ringing cheer echoed to the timbered ceiling.

“The King! The King!” they cried.

Rudolph smiled and shook his head.

“Not so,” he said. “I leave a  
[30]



---

“GENTLEMEN: THE KING!”

---

thankless throne with a joy I find it impossible to express. As I sat on horseback, half-way up the hill above the burning city, and heard the clash of arms, I was filled with amazement to think that men would actually fight for the position of ruler of the people. Whether the insurrection has brought freedom to themselves or not, the future alone can tell, but it has at least brought freedom to me. I now belong to myself. No man may question either my motives or my acts. Gentlemen, drink with me to the new President of Alluria, whoever he may be.”

But the King drank alone, none other raising flagon to lip. Then Baron Brunfels cried aloud:

“*Gentlemen: the King!*”

And never in the history of Alluria was a toast so heartily honoured.

---

---

# *The* C O U N T ' S A P O L O G Y

---

---

THE fifteen nobles, who formed the Council of State for the Moselle Valley, stood in little groups in the Rittersaal of Winneburg's Castle, situated on a hill-top in the Ender Valley, a league or so from the waters of the Moselle. The nobles spoke in low tones together, for a greater than they was present, no other than their over-lord, the Archbishop of Treves, who, in his stately robes of office, paced up and down the long room, glancing now and then through the narrow windows which gave a view down the Ender Valley.

There was a trace of impatience in his Lordship's bearing, and well there might be, for here was the Council of State in assemblage, yet their chair-

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

man was absent, and the nobles stood there helplessly, like a flock of sheep whose shepherd is missing. The chairman was the Count of Winneburg, in whose castle they were now collected, and his lack of punctuality was thus a double discourtesy, for he was host as well as president.

Each in turn had tried to soothe the anger of the Archbishop, for all liked the Count of Winneburg, a bluff and generous-hearted giant, who would stand by his friends against all comers, was the quarrel his own or no. In truth little cared the stalwart Count of Winneburg whose quarrel it was so long as his arm got opportunity of wielding a blow in it. His Lordship of Treves had not taken this championship of the absent man with good grace, and now strode apart from the group, holding himself haughtily; muttering, perhaps prayers, perhaps something else.

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

When one by one the nobles had arrived at Winneburg's Castle, they were informed that its master had gone hunting that morning, saying he would return in time for the mid-day meal, but nothing had been heard of him since, although mounted messengers had been sent forth, and the great bell in the southern tower had been set ringing when the Archbishop arrived. It was the general opinion that Count Winneburg, becoming interested in the chase, had forgotten all about the Council, for it was well known that the Count's body was better suited for athletic sports or warfare than was his mind for the consideration of questions of State, and the nobles, themselves of similar calibre, probably liked him none the less on that account.

Presently the Archbishop stopped in his walk and faced the assemblage. "My Lords," he said, "we have

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

already waited longer than the utmost stretch of courtesy demands. The esteem in which Count Winneburg holds our deliberations is indicated by his inexcusable neglect of a duty conferred upon him by you, and voluntarily accepted by him. I shall therefore take my place in his chair, and I call upon you to seat yourselves at the Council table."

Saying which the Archbishop strode to the vacant chair, and seated himself in it at the head of the board. The nobles looked one at the other with some dismay, for it was never their intention that the Archbishop should preside over their meeting, the object of which was rather to curb that high prelate's ambition, than to confirm still further the power he already held over them.

When, a year before, these Councils of State had been inaugurated, the Archbishop had opposed them,

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

but, finding that the Emperor was inclined to defer to the wishes of his nobles, the Lord of Treves had insisted upon his right to be present during the deliberations, and this right the Emperor had conceded. He further proposed that the meeting should be held at his own castle of Cochem, as being conveniently situated midway between Coblentz and Treves, but to this the nobles had, with fervent unanimity, objected. Cochem Castle, they remembered, possessed strong walls and deep dungeons, and they had no desire to trust themselves within the lion's jaws, having little faith in his Lordship's benevolent intentions towards them.

The Emperor seemed favourable to the selection of Cochem as a convenient place of meeting, and the nobles were nonplussed, because they could not give their real reason for wishing to avoid it, and the Arch-

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

bishop continued to press the claims of Cochem as being of equal advantage to all.

"It is not as though I asked them to come to Treves," said the Archbishop, "for that would entail a long journey upon those living near the Rhine, and in going to Cochem I shall myself be called upon to travel as far as those who come from Coblenz."

The Emperor said :

"It seems a most reasonable selection, and, unless some strong objection be urged, I shall confirm the choice of Cochem."

The nobles were all struck with apprehension at these words, and knew not what to say, when suddenly, to their great delight, up spoke the stalwart Count of Winneburg.

"Your Majesty," he said, "my Castle stands but a short league from Cochem, and has a Rittersaal as large

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

as that in the pinnacled palace owned by the Archbishop. It is equally convenient for all concerned, and every gentleman is right welcome to its hospitality. My cellars are well filled with good wine, and my larders are stocked with an abundance of food. All that can be urged in favour of Cochem applies with equal truth to the Schloss Winneburg. If, therefore, the members of the Council will accept of my roof, it is theirs."

The nobles with universal enthusiasm cried:

"Yes, yes; Winneburg is the spot."

The Emperor smiled, for he well knew that his Lordship of Treves was somewhat miserly in the dispensing of his hospitality. He preferred to see his guests drink the wine of a poor vintage rather than tap the cask which contained the yield of a good year. His Majesty smiled, because he imagined his nobles thought



---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

of the replenishing of their stomachs, whereas they were concerned for the safety of their necks ; but seeing them unanimous in their choice, he nominated Schloss Winneburg as the place of meeting, and so it remained.

When, therefore, the Archbishop of Treves set himself down in the ample chair, to which those present had, without a dissenting vote, elected Count Winneburg, distrust at once took hold of them, for they were ever jealous of the encroachments of their over-lord. The Archbishop glared angrily around him, but no man moved from where he stood.

“I ask you to be seated. The Council is called to order.”

Baron Beilstein cleared his throat and spoke, seemingly with some hesitation, but nevertheless with a touch of obstinacy in his voice :

“May we beg a little more time for Count Winneburg? He has

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

doubtless gone farther afield than he intended when he set out. I myself know something of the fascination of the chase, and can easily understand that it wipes out all remembrance of lesser things."

"Call you this Council a lesser thing?" demanded the Archbishop. "We have waited an hour already, and I shall not give the laggard a moment more."

"Indeed, my Lord, then I am sorry to hear it. I would not willingly be the man who sits in Winneburg's chair, should he come suddenly upon us."

"Is that a threat?" asked the Archbishop, frowning.

"It is not a threat, but rather a warning. I am a neighbour of the Count, and know him well, and whatever his virtues may be, calm patience is not one of them. If time hangs heavily, may I venture to suggest

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

that your Lordship remove the prohibition you proclaimed when the Count's servants offered us wine, and allow me to act temporarily as host, ordering the flagons to be filled, which I think will please Winneburg better when he comes, than finding another in his chair."

"This is no drunken revel, but a Council of State," said the Archbishop sternly; "and I drink no wine when the host is not here to proffer it."

"Indeed, my Lord," said Beilstein, with a shrug of the shoulders, "some of us are so thirsty that we care not who makes the offer, so long as the wine be sound."

What reply the Archbishop would have made can only be conjectured, for at that moment the door burst open and in came Count Winneburg, a head and shoulders above any man in that room, and huge in proportion.

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

“My Lords, my Lords,” he cried, his loud voice booming to the rafters, “how can I ask you to excuse such a breach of hospitality. What! Not a single flagon of wine in the room? This makes my deep regret almost unbearable. Surely, Beilstein, you might have amended that, if only for the sake of an old and constant comrade. Truth, gentlemen, until I heard the bell of the castle toll, I had no thought that this was the day of our meeting, and then, to my despair, I found myself an hour away, and have ridden hard to be among you.”

Then, noticing there was something ominous in the air, and an unaccustomed silence to greet his words, he looked from one to the other, and his eye, travelling up the table, finally rested upon the Archbishop in his chair. Count Winneburg drew himself up, his ruddy face colouring like

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

fire. Then, before any person could reach out hand to check him, or move lip in counsel, the Count, with a fierce oath, strode to the usurper, grasped him by the shoulders, whirled his heels high above his head, and flung him like a sack of corn to the smooth floor, where the unfortunate Archbishop, huddled in a helpless heap, slid along the polished surface as if he were on ice. The fifteen nobles stood stock-still, appalled at this unexpected outrage upon their over-lord. Winneburg seated himself in the chair with an emphasis that made even the solid table rattle, and bringing down his huge fist crashing on the board before him, shouted :

“Let no man occupy my chair, unless he has weight enough to remain there.”

Baron Beilstein, and one or two others, hurried to the prostrate Archbishop and assisted him to his feet.

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

“Count Winneburg,” said Beilstein, “you can expect no sympathy from us for such an act of violence in your own hall.”

“I want none of your sympathy,” roared the angry Count. “Bestow it on the man now in your hands who needs it. If you want the Archbishop of Treves to act as your chairman, elect him to that position and welcome. I shall have no usurpation in my Castle. While I am president I sit in the chair, and none other.”

There was a murmur of approval at this, for one and all were deeply suspicious of the Archbishop's continued encroachments.

His Lordship of Treves once more on his feet, his lips pallid, and his face colourless, looked with undisguised hatred at his assailant. “Winneburg,” he said slowly, “you shall apologise abjectly for this insult, and that in presence of the nobles of

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

this Empire, or I will see to it that not one stone of this castle remains upon another."

"Indeed," said the Count nonchalantly, "I shall apologise to you, my Lord, when you have apologised to me for taking my place. As to the castle, it is said that the devil assisted in the building of it, and it is quite likely that through friendship for you, he may preside over its destruction."

The Archbishop made no reply, but, bowing haughtily to the rest of the company, who looked glum enough, well knowing that the episode they had witnessed meant, in all probability, red war let loose down the smiling valley of the Moselle, left the Rittersaal.

"Now that the Council is duly convened in regular order," said Count Winneburg, when the others had seated themselves round his table,

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

“what questions of state come up for discussion?”

For a moment there was no answer to this query, the delegates looking at one another speechless. But at last Baron Beilstein, shrugging his shoulder, said drily :

“Indeed, my Lord Count, I think the time for talk is past, and I suggest that we all look closely to the strengthening of our walls, which are likely to be tested before long by the Lion of Treves. It was perhaps unwise, Winneburg, to have used the Archbishop so roughly, he being unaccustomed to athletic exercise; but, let the consequences be what they may, I, for one, will stand by you.”

“And I; and I; and I; and I,” cried the others, with the exception of the Knight of Ehrenburg, who, living as he did near the town of Coblenz, was learned in the law, and not so



---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

ready as some of his comrades to speak first and think afterwards.

“My good friends,” cried their presiding officer, deeply moved by this token of their fealty, “what I have done I have done, be it wise or the reverse, and the results must fall on my head alone. No words of mine can remove the dust of the floor from the Archbishop’s cloak, so if he comes, let him come. I will give him as hearty a welcome as it is in my power to render. All I ask is fair play, and those who stand aside shall see a good fight. It is not right that a hasty act of mine should embroil the peaceful country side, so if Treves comes on I shall meet him alone here in my castle. But, nevertheless, I thank you all for your offers of help ; that is all, except the Knight of Ehrenburg, whose tender of assistance, if made, has escaped my ear.”

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

The Knight of Ehrenburg had, up to that moment, been studying the texture of the oaken table on which his flagon sat. Now he looked up and spoke slowly.

“I made no proffer of help,” he said, “because none will be needed, I believe, so far as the Archbishop of Treves is concerned. The Count a moment ago said that all he wanted was fair play, but that is just what he has no right to expect from his present antagonist. The Archbishop will make no attempt on this castle; he will act much more subtly than that. The Archbishop will lay the redress of his quarrel upon the shoulders of the Emperor, and it is the oncoming of the Imperial troops you have to fear, and not an invasion from Treves. Against the forces of the Emperor we are powerless, united or divided. Indeed, his Majesty may call upon us to invest this castle,

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

whereupon, if we refuse, we are rebels who have broken our oaths."

"What then is there left for me to do?" asked the Count, dismayed at the coil in which he had involved himself.

"Nothing," advised the Knight of Ehrenburg, "except to apologise abjectly to the Archbishop, and that not too soon, for his Lordship may refuse to accept it. But when he formally demands it, I should render it to him on his own terms, and think myself well out of an awkward position."

The Count of Winneburg rose from his seat, and lifting his clinched fist high above his head, shook it at the timbers of the roof.

"That," he cried, "will I never do, while one stone of Winneburg stands upon another."

At this, those present, always with the exception of the Knight of Ehrenburg, sprang to their feet, shouting:

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

“Imperial troops or no, we stand by the Count of Winneburg!”

Some one flashed forth a sword, and instantly a glitter of blades was in the air, while cheer after cheer rang to the rafters. When the uproar had somewhat subsided, the Knight of Ehrenburg said calmly:

“My castle stands nearest to the capital, and will be the first to fall, but, nevertheless, hoping to do my shouting when the war is ended, I join my forces with those of the rest of you.”

And amidst this unanimity, and much emptying of flagons, the assemblage dissolved, each man with his escort taking his way to his own stronghold, perhaps to con more soberly, next day, the problem that confronted him. They were fighters all, and would not flinch when the pinch came, whatever the outcome.

Day followed day with no sign

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

from Treves. Winneburg employed the time in setting his house in order to be ready for whatever chanced, and just as the Count was beginning to congratulate himself that his deed was to be without consequences, there rode up to his castle gates a horseman, accompanied by two lancers, and on the newcomer's breast were emblazoned the Imperial arms. Giving voice to his horn, the gates were at once thrown open to him, and, entering, he demanded instant speech with the Count.

"My Lord, Count Winneburg," he said, when that giant had presented himself, "His Majesty the Emperor commands me to summon you to the court at Frankfort."

"Do you take me as prisoner, then?" asked the Count.

"Nothing was said to me of arrest. I was merely commissioned to deliver to you the message of the Emperor."

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

“What are your orders if I refuse to go?”

A hundred armed men stood behind the Count, a thousand more were within call of the castle bell; two lances only were at the back of the messenger; but the strength of the broadcast empire was betokened by the symbol on his breast.

“My orders are to take back your answer to his Imperial Majesty,” replied the messenger calmly.

The Count, though hot-headed, was no fool, and he stood for a moment pondering on the words which the Knight of Ehrenburg had spoken on taking his leave:

“Let not the crafty Archbishop embroil you with the Emperor.”

This warning had been the cautious warrior's parting advice to him.

“If you will honour my humble roof,” said the Count slowly, “by taking refreshment beneath it, I shall

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

be glad of your company afterwards to Frankfort, in obedience to his Majesty's commands."

The messenger bowed low, accepted the hospitality, and together they made way across the Moselle, and along the Roman road to the capital.

Within the walls of Frankfort the Count was lodged in rooms near the palace, to which his conductor guided him, and, although it was still held that he was not a prisoner, an armed man paced to and fro before his door all night. The day following his arrival, Count Winneburg was summoned to the Court, and in a large ante-room found himself one of a numerous throng, conspicuous among them all by reason of his great height and bulk.

The huge hall was hung with tapestry, and at the further end were heavy curtains, at each edge of which

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

stood half-a-dozen armoured men, the detachments being under command of two gaily uniformed officers. Occasionally the curtains were parted by menials who stood there to perform that duty, and high nobles entered, or came out, singly and in groups. Down the sides of the hall were packed some hundreds of people, chattering together for the most part, and gazing at those who passed up and down the open space in the centre.

The Count surmised that the Emperor held his Court in whatever apartment was behind the crimson curtains. He felt the eyes of the multitude upon him, and shifted uneasily from one foot to another, cursing his ungainliness, ashamed of the tingling of the blood in his cheeks. He was out of place in this laughing, talking crowd, experiencing the sensations of an uncouth rustic suddenly



---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

thrust into the turmoil of a metropolis, resenting bitterly the supposed sneers that were flung at him. He suspected that the whispering and the giggling were directed towards himself, and burned to draw his sword and let these popinjays know for once what a man could do. As a matter of fact it was a buzz of admiration at his stature which went up when he entered, but the Count had so little of self-conceit in his soul that he never even guessed the truth.

Two nobles passing near him, he heard one of them say distinctly :

“That is the fellow who threw the Archbishop over his head,” while the other, glancing at him, said :

“By the Coat, he seems capable of upsetting the three of them, and I, for one, wish more power to his muscle should he attempt it.”

The Count shrank against the tapestried walls, hot with anger, wishing

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

himself a dwarf that he might escape the gaze of so many inquiring eyes. Just as the scrutiny was becoming unbearable, his companion touched him on the elbow, and said in a low voice :

“Count Winneburg, follow me.”

He held aside the tapestry at the back of the Count, and that noble, nothing loath, disappeared from view behind it.

Entering a narrow passage-way, they traversed it until they came to a closed door, at each lintel of which stood a pikeman, fronted with a shining breastplate of metal. The Count's conductor knocked gently at the closed door, then opened it, holding it so that the Count could pass in, and when he had done so, the door closed softly behind him. To his amazement, Winneburg saw before him, standing at the further end of the small room, the Emperor Ru-

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

dolph, entirely alone. The Count was about to kneel awkwardly, when his liege strode forward and prevented him.

“Count Winneburg,” he said, “from what I hear of you, your elbow-joints are more supple than those of your knees, therefore let us be thankful that on this occasion there is no need to use either. I see you are under the mistaken impression that the Emperor is present. Put that thought from your mind, and regard me simply as Lord Rudolph—one gentleman wishing to have some little conversation with another.”

“Your Majesty—” stammered the Count.

“I have but this moment suggested that you forget that title, my Lord. But, leaving aside all question of salutation, let us get to the heart of the matter, for I think we are both

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

direct men. You are summoned to Frankfort because that high and mighty Prince of the Church, the Archbishop of Treves, has made complaint to the Emperor against you, alleging what seems to be an unpardonable indignity suffered by him at your hands."

"Your Majesty — my Lord, I mean," faltered the Count. "The indignity was of his own seeking; he sat down in my chair, where he had no right to place himself, and I — I — persuaded him to relinquish his position."

"So I am informed — that is to say, so his Majesty has been informed," replied Rudolph, a slight smile hovering round his finely chiselled lips. "We are not here to comment upon any of the Archbishop's delinquencies, but, granting, for the sake of argument, that he had encroached upon your rights, never-

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

theless, he was under your roof, and honestly, I fail to see that you were justified in cracking his heels against the same."

"Well, your Majesty — again I beg your Majesty's pardon —"

"Oh, no matter," said the Emperor, "call me what you like; names signify little."

"If then the Emperor," continued the Count, "found an intruder sitting on his throne, would he like it, think you?"

"His feeling, perhaps, would be one of astonishment, my Lord Count, but speaking for the Emperor, I am certain that he would never lay hands on the usurper, or treat him like a sack of corn in a yeoman's barn."

The Count laughed heartily at this, and was relieved to find that this quitted him of the tension which the great presence had at first inspired.

"Truth to tell, your Majesty, I

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

am sorry I touched him. I should have requested him to withdraw, but my arm has always been more prompt in action than my tongue, as you can readily see since I came into this room."

"Indeed, Count, your tongue does you very good service," continued the Emperor, "and I am glad to have from you an expression of regret. I hope, therefore, that you will have no hesitation in repeating that declaration to the Archbishop of Treves."

"Does your Majesty mean that I am to apologise to him?"

"Yes," answered the Emperor.

There was a moment's pause, then the Count said slowly :

"I will surrender to your Majesty my person, my sword, my castle, and my lands. I will, at your word, prostrate myself at your feet, and humbly beg pardon for any offence I

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

have committed against you, but to tell the Archbishop I am sorry when I am not, and to cringe before him and supplicate his grace, well, your Majesty, as between man and man, I'll see him damned first."

Again the Emperor had some difficulty in preserving that rigidity of expression which he had evidently resolved to maintain.

"Have you ever met a ghost, my Lord Count?" he asked.

Winneburg crossed himself devoutly, a sudden pallor sweeping over his face.

"Indeed, your Majesty, I have seen strange things, and things for which there was no accounting; but it has been usually after a contest with the wine flagon, and at the time my head was none of the clearest, so I could not venture to say whether they were ghosts or no."

"Imagine, then, that in one of  
[ 61 ]

the corridors of your castle at midnight you met a white-robed transparent figure, through whose form your sword passed scathlessly. What would you do, my Lord?"

“ Indeed, your Majesty, I would take to my heels, and bestow myself elsewhere as speedily as possible.”

“Most wisely spoken, and you, who are no coward, who fear not to face willingly in combat anything natural, would, in certain circumstances, trust to swift flight for your protection. Very well, my Lord, you are now confronted with something against which your stout arm is as unavailing as it would be if an apparition stood in your path. There is before you the spectre of subtlety. Use arm instead of brain, and you are a lost man.

“The Archbishop expects no apology. He looks for a stalwart, stubborn man, defying himself and the



---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

Empire combined. You think, perhaps, that the Imperial troops will surround your castle, and that you may stand a siege. Now the Emperor would rather have you fight with him than against him, but in truth there will be no contest. Hold to your refusal, and you will be arrested before you leave the precincts of this palace. You will be thrown into a dungeon, your castle and your lands sequestered; and I call your attention to the fact that your estate adjoins the possessions of the Archbishop at Cochem, and Heaven fend me for hinting that his Lordship casts covetous eyes over his boundary; yet, nevertheless, he will probably not refuse to accept your possessions in reparation for the insult bestowed upon him. Put it this way if you like. Would you rather pleasure me or pleasure the Archbishop of Treves?"

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

“There is no question as to that,” answered the Count.

“Then it will please me well if you promise to apologise to his Lordship the Archbishop of Treves. That his Lordship will be equally pleased, I very much doubt.”

“Will your Majesty command me in open Court to apologise?”

“I shall request you to do so. I must uphold the Feudal law.”

“Then I beseech your Majesty to command me, for I am a loyal subject, and will obey.”

“God give me many such,” said the Emperor fervently, “and bestow upon me the wisdom to deserve them!”

He extended his hand to the Count, then touched a bell on the table beside him. The officer who had conducted Winneburg entered silently, and acted as his guide back to the thronged apartment they had

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

left. The Count saw that the great crimson curtains were now looped up giving a view of the noble interior of the room beyond, thronged with the notables of the Empire. The hall leading to it was almost deserted, and the Count, under convoy of two lancemen, himself nearly as tall as their weapons, passed in to the Throne Room, and found all eyes turned upon him.

He was brought to a stand before an elevated daïs, the centre of which was occupied by a lofty throne, which, at the moment, was empty. Near it, on the elevation, stood the three Archbishops of Treves, Cologne, and Mayence, on the other side the Count Palatine of the Rhine with the remaining three Electors. The nobles of the realm occupied places according to their degree.

As the stalwart Count came in, a buzz of conversation swept over the

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

hall like a breeze among the leaves of a forest. A malignant scowl darkened the countenance of the Archbishop of Treves, but the faces of Cologne and Mayence expressed a certain Christian resignation regarding the contumely which had been endured by their colleague. The Count stood stolidly where he was placed, and gazed at the vacant throne, turning his eyes neither to the right nor the left.

Suddenly there was a fanfare of trumpets, and instant silence smote the assembly. First came officers of the Imperial Guard in shining armour, then the immediate advisers and councillors of his Majesty, and last of all, the Emperor himself, a robe of great richness clasped at his throat, and trailing behind him; the crown of the Empire upon his head. His face was pale and stern, and he looked what he was, a monarch, and

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

a man. The Count rubbed his eyes, and could scarcely believe that he stood now in the presence of one who had chatted amiably with him but a few moments before.

The Emperor sat on his throne and one of his councillors whispered for some moments to him ; then the Emperor said, in a low, clear voice, that penetrated to the farthest corner of the vast apartment :

“Is the Count of Winneburg here?”

“Yes, your Majesty.”

“Let him stand forward.”

The Count strode two long steps to the front, and stood there, red-faced and abashed. The officer at his side whispered :

“Kneel, you fool, kneel.”

And the Count got himself somewhat clumsily down upon his knees, like an elephant preparing to receive his burden. The face of the Em-

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

peror remained impassive, and he said harshly :

“Stand up.”

The Count, once more upon his feet, breathed a deep sigh of satisfaction at finding himself again in an upright posture.

“Count of Winneburg,” said the Emperor slowly, “it is alleged that upon the occasion of the last meeting of the Council of State for the Moselle valley, you, in presence of the nobles there assembled, cast a slight upon your over-lord, the Archbishop of Treves. Do you question the statement?”

The Count cleared his throat several times, which in the stillness of that vaulted room sounded like the distant booming of cannon.

“If to cast the Archbishop half the distance of this room is to cast a slight upon him, I did so, your Majesty.”

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

There was a simultaneous ripple of laughter at this, instantly suppressed when the searching eye of the Emperor swept the room.

“Sir Count,” said the Emperor severely, “the particulars of your outrage are not required of you ; only your admission thereof. Hear, then, my commands. Betake yourself to your castle of Winneburg, and hold yourself there in readiness to proceed to Treves on a day appointed by his Lordship the Archbishop, an Elector of this Empire, there to humble yourself before him, and crave his pardon for the offence you have committed. Disobey at your peril.”

Once or twice the Count moistened his dry lips, then he said :

“Your Majesty, I will obey any command you place upon me.”

“In that case,” continued the Emperor, his severity visibly relaxing, “I can promise that your over-lord will

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

not hold this incident against you. Such, I understand, is your intention, my Lord Archbishop?" and the Emperor turned toward the Prince of Treves.

The Archbishop bowed low, and thus veiled the malignant hatred in his eyes.

"Yes, your Majesty," he replied, "providing the apology is given as publicly as was the insult, in presence of those who were witnesses of the Count's foolishness."

"That is but a just condition," said the Emperor. "It is my pleasure that the Council be summoned to Treves to hear the Count's apology. And now, Count of Winneburg, you are at liberty to withdraw."

The Count drew his mammoth hand across his brow, and scattered to the floor the moisture that had collected there. He tried to speak, but apparently could not, then turned



---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

and walked resolutely towards the door. There was instant outcry at this, the Chamberlain of the Court standing in stupefied amazement at a breach of etiquette which exhibited any man's back to the Emperor; but a smile relaxed the Emperor's lips, and he held up his hand.

"Do not molest him," he said, as the Count disappeared. "He is unused to the artificial manners of a Court. In truth, I take it as a friendly act, for I am sure the valiant Count never turned his back upon a foe," which Imperial witticism was well received, for the sayings of an Emperor rarely lack applause.

The Count, wending his long way home by the route he had come, spent the first half of the journey in cursing the Archbishop, and the latter half in thinking over the situation. By the time he had reached his castle he had formulated a plan, and this

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

plan he proceeded to put into execution on receiving the summons of the Archbishop to come to Treves on the first day of the following month and make his apology, the Archbishop, with characteristic penuriousness, leaving the inviting of the fifteen nobles, who formed the Council, to Winneburg, and thus his Lordship of Treves was saved the expense of sending special messengers to each. In case Winneburg neglected to summon the whole Council, the Archbishop added to his message the statement that he would refuse to receive the apology if any of the nobles were absent.

Winneburg sent messengers, first to Beilstein, asking him to attend at Treves on the second day of the month, and bring with him an escort of at least a thousand men. Another he asked for the third, another for the fourth, another for the fifth, and so

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

on, resolved that before a complete quorum was present, half of the month would be gone, and with it most of the Archbishop's provender, for his Lordship, according to the laws of hospitality, was bound to entertain free of all charge to themselves the various nobles and their followings.

On the first day of the month Winneburg entered the northern gate of Treves, accompanied by two hundred horsemen and eight hundred foot soldiers. At first the officers of the Archbishop thought that an invasion was contemplated, but Winneburg suavely explained that if a thing was worth doing at all, it was worth doing well, and he was not going to make any hole-and-corner affair of his apology. Next day Beilstein came along accompanied by five hundred cavalry, and five hundred foot soldiers.

The Chamberlain of the Arch-

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

bishop was in despair at having to find quarters for so many, but he did the best he could, while the Archbishop was enraged to observe that the nobles did not assemble in greater haste, but each as he came had a plausible excuse for his delay. Some had to build bridges, sickness had broken out in another camp, while a third expedition had lost its way and wandered in the forest.

The streets of Treves each night resounded with songs of revelry, varied by the clash of swords, when a party of the newcomers fell foul of a squad of the town soldiers, and the officers on either side had much ado to keep the peace among their men. The Archbishop's wine cups were running dry, and the price of provisions had risen, the whole surrounding country being placed under contribution for provender and drink. When a week had elapsed the Arch-

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

bishop relaxed his dignity and sent for Count Winneburg.

"We will not wait for the others," he said. "I have no desire to humiliate you unnecessarily. Those who are here shall bear witness that you have apologised, and so I shall not insist on the presence of the laggards, but will receive your apology to-morrow at high noon in the great council chamber."

"Ah, there speaks a noble heart, ever thinking generously of those who despitefully use you, my Lord Archbishop," said Count Winneburg. "But no, no, I cannot accept such a sacrifice. The Emperor showed me plainly the enormity of my offence. In the presence of all I insulted you, wretch that I am, and in the presence of all shall I abase myself."

"But I do not seek your abasement," protested the Archbishop, frowning.

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

“The more honour, then, to your benevolent nature,” answered the Count, “and the more shameful would it be of me to take advantage of it. As I stood a short time since on the walls, I saw coming up the river the banners of the Knight of Ehrenburg. His castle is the furthest removed from Treves, and so the others cannot surely delay long. We will wait, my Lord Archbishop, until all are here. But I thank you just as much for your generosity as if I were craven enough to shield myself behind it.”

The Knight of Ehrenburg in due time arrived, and behind him his thousand men, many of whom were compelled to sleep in the public buildings, for all the rooms in Treves were occupied. Next day the Archbishop summoned the assembled nobles and said he would hear the apology in their presence. If the

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

others missed it, it was their own fault—they should have been in time.

“I cannot apologise,” said the Count, “until all are here. It was the Emperor’s order, and who am I to disobey my Emperor? We must await their coming with patience, and, indeed, Treves is a goodly town, in which all of us find ourselves fully satisfied.”

“Then, my blessing on you all,” said the Archbishop in a sour tone most unsuited to the benediction he was bestowing. “Return, I beg of you, instantly, to your castles. I forego the apology.”

“But I insist on tendering it,” cried the Count, his mournful voice giving some indication of the sorrow he felt at his offence if it went unrequited. “It is my duty, not only to you, my Lord Archbishop, but also to his Majesty the Emperor.”

---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

"Then, in Heaven's name get on with it and depart. I am willing to accept it on your own terms, as I have said before."

"No, not on my own terms, but on yours. What matters the delay of a week or two? The hunting season does not begin for a fortnight, and we are all as well at Treves as at home. Besides, how could I ever face my Emperor again, knowing I had disobeyed his commands?"

"I will make it right with the Emperor," said the Archbishop.

The Knight of Ehrenburg now spoke up, calmly, as was his custom:

"'Tis a serious matter," he said, "for a man to take another's word touching action of his Majesty the Emperor. You have clerks here with you; perhaps then you will bid them indite a document to be signed by yourself absolving my friend, the Count of Winneburg, from all neces-



---

## THE COUNT'S APOLOGY

---

sity of apologising, so that should the Emperor take offence at his disobedience, the parchment may hold him scathless."

"I will do anything to be quit of you," muttered the Archbishop more to himself than to the others.

And so the document was written and signed. With this parchment in his saddle-bags the Count and his comrades quitted the town, drinking in half flagons the health of the Archbishop, because there was not left in Treves enough wine to fill the measures to the brim.

---

# COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

**I**T was nearly midnight when Count Konrad von Hochstaden reached his castle on the Rhine, with a score of very tired and hungry men behind him. The warder at the gate of Schloss Hochstaden, after some cautious parley with the newcomers, joyously threw apart the two great iron-studded oaken leaves of the portal when he was convinced that it was indeed his young master who had arrived after some tumultuous years at the crusades, and Count Konrad with his followers rode clattering under the stone arch, into the ample courtyard. It is recorded that, in the great hall of the castle, the Count and his twenty bronzed and scarred knights ate such a meal as had never before

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

been seen to disappear in Hochstaden, and that after drinking with great cheer to the downfall of the Saracen and the triumph of the true cross, they all lay on the floor of the Rittersaal and slept the remainder of the night, the whole of next day, and did not awaken until the dawn of the second morning. They had had years of hard fighting in the East, and on the way home they had been compelled to work their passage through the domains of turbulent nobles by good stout broadsword play, the only argument their opposers could understand, and thus they had come through to the Rhine without contributing aught to their opponents except fierce blows, which were not commodities as marketable as yellow gold, yet with this sole exchange did the twenty-one win their way from Palestine to the Palatinate, and thus were they so long on the road that

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

those in Schloss Hochstaden had given up all expectation of their coming.

Count Konrad found that his father, whose serious illness was the cause of his return, had been dead for months past, and the young man wandered about the castle which, during the past few years, he had beheld only in dreams by night and in the desert mirages by day, saddened because of his loss. He would return to the Holy Land, he said to himself, and let the castle be looked after by its custodian until the war with the heathen was ended.

The young Count walked back and forth on the stone-paved terrace which commanded from its height such a splendid view of the winding river, but he paid small attention to the landscape, striding along with his hands clasped behind him; his head bent, deep in thought. He was

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

awakened from his reverie by the coming of the ancient custodian of the castle, who shuffled up to him and saluted him with reverential respect, for the Count was now the last of his race; a fighting line, whose members rarely came to die peaceably in their beds as Konrad's father had done.

The Count, looking up, swept his eye around the horizon and then to his astonishment saw the red battle flag flying grimly from the high northern tower of Castle Bernstein perched on the summit of the next hill to the south. In the valley were the white tents of an encampment, and fluttering over it was a flag whose device, at that distance, the Count could not discern.

"Why is the battle flag flying on Bernstein, Gottlieb, and what means those tents in the valley?" asked Konrad.

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

The old man looked in the direction of the encampment, as if the sight were new to him, but Konrad speedily saw that the opposite was the case. The tents had been there so long that they now seemed a permanent part of the scenery.

“The Archbishop of Cologne, my Lord, is engaged in the besiegement of Schloss Bernstein, and seems like to have a long job of it. He has been there for nearly a year now.”

“Then the stout Baron is making a brave defence; good luck to him!”

“Alas, my Lord, I am grieved to state that the Baron went to his rest on the first day of the assault. He foolishly sallied out at the head of his men and fell hotly on the Archbishop's troops, who were surrounding the castle. There was some matter in dispute between the Baron and the Archbishop, and to aid the settlement thereof, his mighty Lordship of

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

Cologne sent a thousand armed men up the river, and it is said that all he wished was to have parley with Baron Bernstein, and to overawe him in the discussion, but the Baron came out at the head of his men and fell upon the Cologne troops so mightily that he nearly put the whole battalion to flight, but the officers rallied their panic-stricken host, seeing how few were opposed to them, and the order was given that the Baron should be taken prisoner, but the old man would not have it so, and fought so sturdily with his long sword, that he nearly entrenched himself with a wall of dead. At last the old man was cut down and died gloriously, with scarcely a square inch unwounded on his whole body. The officers of the Archbishop then tried to carry the castle by assault, but the Lady of Bernstein closed and barred the gate, ran up the battle flag on the northern

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

tower and bid defiance to the Archbishop and all his men."

"The Lady of Bernstein? I thought the Baron was a widower. Whom, then, did he again marry?"

"'Twas not his wife, but his daughter."

"His daughter? Not Brunhilda? She's but a child of ten."

"She was when you went away, my Lord, but now she is a woman of eighteen, with all the beauty of her mother and all the bravery of her father."

"Burning Cross of the East, Gottlieb! Do you mean to say that for a year a prince of the Church has been warring with a girl, and her brother, knowing nothing of this cowardly assault, fighting the battles for his faith on the sands of the desert? Let the bugle sound! Call up my men and arouse those who are still sleeping."



---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

"My Lord, my Lord, I beg of you to have caution in this matter."

"Caution? God's patience! Has caution rotted the honour out of the bones of all Rhine men, that this outrage should pass unmolested before their eyes! The father murdered; the daughter beleaguered; while those who call themselves men sleep sound in their safe castles! Out of my way, old man! Throw open the gates!"

But the ancient custodian stood firmly before his over-lord, whose red angry face seemed like that of the sun rising so ruddily behind him.

"My Lord, if you insist on engaging in this enterprise it must be gone about sanely. You need the old head as well as the young arm. You have a score of well-seasoned warriors, and we can gather into the castle another hundred. But the Archbishop has a thousand men around Bernstein.

---

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

Your score would but meet the fate of the old Baron and would not better the case of those within the castle. The Archbishop has not assaulted Bernstein since the Baron's death, but has drawn a tight line around it and so has cut off all supplies, daily summoning the maiden to surrender. What they now need in Bernstein is not iron, but food. Through long waiting they keep slack watch about the castle, and it is possible that, with care taken at midnight you might reprovision Bernstein so that she could hold out until her brother comes, whom it is said she has summoned from the Holy Land."

"Thou art wise, old Gottlieb," said the Count slowly, pausing in his wrath as the difficulties of the situation were thus placed in array before him; "wise and cautious, as all men seem to be who now keep ward on

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

the Rhine. What said my father regarding this contest?"

"My Lord, your honoured father was in his bed stricken with the long illness that came to be his undoing at the last, and we never let him know that the Baron was dead or the siege in progress."

"Again wise and cautious, Gottlieb, for had he known it, he would have risen from his death-bed, taken down his two-handed sword from the wall, and struck his last blow in defence of the right against tyranny."

"Indeed, my Lord, under danger of your censure, I venture to say that you do not yet know the cause of the quarrel into which you design to precipitate yourself. It may not be tyranny on the part of the overlord, but disobedience on the part of the vassal, which causes the environment of Bernstein. And the

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

Archbishop is a prince of our holy Church."

"I leave those nice distinctions to philosophers like thee, Gottlieb. It is enough for me to know that a thousand men are trying to starve one woman, and as for being a prince of the Church, I shall give his devout Lordship a taste of religion hot from its birthplace, and show him how we uphold the cause in the East, for in this matter the Archbishop grasps not the cross but the sword, and by the sword shall he be met. And now go, Gottlieb, set ablaze the fires on all our ovens and put the bakers at work. Call in your hundred men as speedily as possible, and bid each man bring with him a sack of wheat. Spend the day at the baking and fill the cellars with grain and wine. It will be reason enough, if any make inquiry, to say that the young Lord has returned and intends to hold

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

feasts in his castle. Send hither my Captain to me."

Old Gottlieb hobbled away, and there presently came upon the terrace a stalwart, grizzled man, somewhat past middle age, whose brown face showed more seams of scars than remnants of beauty. He saluted his chief and stood erect in silence.

The Count waved his hand toward the broad valley and said grimly :

"There sits the Archbishop of Cologne, besieging the Castle of Bernstein."

The Captain bowed low and crossed himself.

"God prosper his Lordship," he said piously.

"You may think that scarcely the phrase to use, Captain, when I tell you that you will lead an assault on his Lordship to-night."

"Then God prosper *us*, my Lord," replied the Captain cheerfully, for he

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

was ever a man who delighted more in fighting than in inquiring keenly into the cause thereof.

"You may see from here that a ridge runs round from this castle, bending back from the river, which it again approaches, touching thus Schloss Bernstein. There is a path along the summit of the ridge which I have often trodden as a boy, so I shall be your guide. It is scarce likely that this path is guarded, but if it is we will have to throw its keepers over the precipice; those that we do not slay outright, when we come upon them."

"Excellent, my Lord, most excellent," replied the Captain, gleefully rubbing his huge hands one over the other.

"But it is not entirely to fight that we go. You are to act as convoy to those who carry bread to Castle Bernstein. We shall leave here at

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

the darkest hour after midnight, and you must return before daybreak so that the Archbishop cannot estimate our numbers. Then get out all the old armour there is in the castle and masquerade the peasants in it. Arrange them along the battlements so that they will appear as numerous as possible while I stay in Castle Bernstein and make terms with the Archbishop, for it seems he out-mans us, so we must resort, in some measure, to strategy. On the night assault let each man yell as if he were ten and lay about him mightily. Are the knaves astir yet?"

"Most of them, my Lord, and drinking steadily the better to endure the dryness of the desert when we go eastward again."

"Well, see to it that they do not drink so much as to interfere with clean sword-play against to-night's business."

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

“ Indeed, my Lord, I have a doubt if there is Rhine wine enough in the castle’s vaults to do that, and the men yell better when they have a few gallons within them.”

At the appointed hour Count Konrad and his company went silently forth, escorting a score more who carried sacks of the newly baked bread on their backs, or leathern receptacles filled with wine, as well as a stout cask of the same seductive fluid. Near the Schloss Bernstein the rescuing party came upon the Archbishop’s outpost, who raised the alarm before the good sword of the Captain cut through the cry. There were bugle calls throughout the camp and the sound of men hurrying to their weapons, but all the noise of preparation among the besiegers was as nothing to the demoniac din sent up by the Crusaders, who rushed to the onslaught with a zest sharpened



---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

by their previous rest and inactivity. The wild, barbaric nature of their yells, such as never before were heard on the borders of the placid Rhine, struck consternation into the opposition camp, because some of the Archbishop's troops had fought against the heathen in the East, and they now recognised the clamour which had before, on many an occasion, routed them, and they thought that the Saracens had turned the tables and invaded Germany; indeed from the deafening clamour it seemed likely that all Asia was let loose upon them. The alarm spread quickly to Castle Bernstein itself, and torches began to glimmer on its battlements. With a roar the Crusaders rushed up to the foot of the wall, as a wave dashes against a rock, sweeping the frightened bread-carriers with them. By the light of the torches Konrad saw standing on

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

the wall a fair young girl clad in chain armour whose sparkling links glistened like countless diamonds in the rays of the burning pitch. She leaned on the cross-bar of her father's sword, and with wide-open, eager eyes peered into the darkness beyond, questioning the gloom for reason of the terrifying tumult. When Konrad strode within the radius of the torches, the girl drew back slightly and cried :

“ So the Archbishop has at last summoned courage to attack, after all this patient waiting.”

“ My Lady,” shouted the Count, “ these are my forces and not the Archbishop's. I am Konrad, Count of Hochstaden.”

“ The more shame, then, that you, who have fought bravely with men, should now turn your weapons against a woman, and she your neighbour and the sister of your friend.”

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

"Indeed, Lady Brunhilda, you misjudge me. I am come to your rescue and not to your disadvantage. The Archbishop's men were put to some inconvenience by our unexpected arrival, and to gather from the sounds far down the valley they have not ceased running yet. We come with bread, and use the sword but as a spit to deliver it."

"Your words are welcome were I but sure of their truth," said the lady with deep distrust in her tone, for she had had experience of the Archbishop's craft on many occasions, and the untimely hour of the succour led her to fear a ruse. "I open my gates neither to friend nor to foe in the darkness," she added.

"'Tis a rule that may well be commended to others of your bewitching sex," replied the Count, "but we ask not the opening of the gates, although you might warn those within your

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

courtyard to beware what comes upon them presently."

So saying, he gave the word, and each of his two servitors seized a sack of bread by the ends and, heaving it, flung it over the wall. Some of the sacks fell short, but the second effort sent them into the courtyard, where many of them burst, scattering the round loaves along the cobble-stoned pavement, to be eagerly pounced upon by the starving servitors and such men-at-arms as had escaped from the encounter with the Archbishop's troops when the Baron was slain. The cries of joy that rang up from within the castle delighted the ear of the Count and softened the suspicion of the lady on the wall.

"Now," cried Konrad to his Captain, "back to Schloss Hochstaden before the dawn approaches too closely, and let there be no mistake in the Archbishop's camp that you are on the way."

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

They all departed in a series of earsplitting, heart-appalling whoops that shattered the still night air and made a vocal pandemonium of that portion of the fair Rhine valley. The colour left the cheeks of the Lady of Bernstein as she listened in palpable terror to the fiendish outcry which seemed to scream for blood and that instantly. Looking down she saw the Knight of Hochstaden still there at the foot of her wall gazing up at her.

“My Lord,” she said with concern, “if you stay thus behind your noisy troop you will certainly be captured when it comes day.”

“My Lady of Bernstein, I am already a captive, and all the Archbishop's men could not hold me more in thrall did they surround me at this moment.”

“I do not understand you, sir,” said Brunhilda coldly, drawing herself up

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

with a dignity that well became her, "your language seems to partake of an exaggeration that doubtless you have learned in the tropical East, and which we have small patience with on the more temperate banks of the Rhine."

"The language that I use, fair Brunhilda, knows neither east nor west, north nor south, but is common to every land, and if it be a stranger to the Rhine, the Saints be witness 't is full time 't were introduced here, and I hold myself as competent to be its spokesman, as those screeching scoundrels of mine hold themselves the equal in battle to all the archbishops who ever wore the robes of that high office."

"My Lord," cried Brunhilda, a note of serious warning in her voice, "my gates are closed and they remain so. I hold myself your debtor for unasked aid, and would fain see you in a place of safety."

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

“My revered Lady, that friendly wish shall presently be gratified,” and saying this, the Count unwound from his waist a thin rope woven of horse-hair, having a long loop at the end of it. This he whirled round his head, and with an art learned in the scaling of eastern walls flung the loop so that it surrounded one of the machicolations of the bastion, and, with his feet travelling against the stone work, he walked up the wall by aid of this cord and was over the parapet before any could hinder his ascent. The Maid of the Schloss, her brows drawn down in anger, stood with sword ready to strike, but whether it was the unwieldiness of the clumsy weapon, or whether it was the great celerity with which the young man put his nimbleness to the test, or whether it was that she recognised him as perhaps her one friend on

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

earth, who can tell ; be that as it may, she did not strike in time, and a moment later the Count dropped on one knee and before she knew it raised one of her hands to his bending lips.

"Lovely Warder of Bernstein," cried Count Konrad, with a tremor of emotion in his voice that thrilled the girl in spite of herself, "I lay my devotion and my life at your feet, to use them as you will."

"My Lord," she said, quaveringly, with tears nearer the surface than she would have cared to admit, "I like not this scaling of the walls, my permission unasked."

"God's truth, my Lady, and you are not the first to so object, but the others were men, and I may say, without boasting, that I bent not the knee to them when I reached their level, but I have been told that custom will enable a maid to look





---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

broad breast seemed to her swimming eyes to blaze with lambent flame in the yellow torchlight. She dared not trust her voice to answer him, fearing its faintness might disown the courage with which she had held her castle for so long, and he, seeing that she struggled to hold control of herself, standing there like a superb Goddess of the Rhine, pretended to notice nothing and spoke jauntily, with a wave of his hand: "My villains have brought to the foot of the walls a cask of our best wine which we dared not adventure to cast into the courtyard with that freedom which forwarded the loaves; there is also a packet of dainties more suited to your Ladyship's consideration than the coarse bread from our ovens. Give command, I beg of you, that the gates be opened and that your men bring the wine and food to safety within the courtyard,

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

and bestow on me the privilege of guarding the open gate while this is being done."

Then gently, with insistent deference, the young man took from her the sword of her father which she yielded to him with visible reluctance, but nevertheless yielded, standing there disarmed before him. Together in silence they went down the stone steps that led from the battlements to the courtyard, followed by the torch-bearers, whom the lightning east threatened soon to render unnecessary. A cheer went up, the first heard for many days within those walls, and the feasters, flinging their caps in the air, cried "Hochstaden! Hochstaden!" The Count turned to his fair companion and said, with a smile:

"The garrison is with me, my Lady."

She smiled also, and sighed, but  
[ 105 ]

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

made no other reply, keeping her eyes steadfast on the stone steps beneath her. Once descended, she gave the order in a low voice, and quickly the gates were thrown wide, creaking grumblingly on their hinges, long unused. Konrad stood before the opening with the sword of Bernstein in his hands, swinging it this way and that to get the hang of it, and looking on it with the admiration which a warrior ever feels for a well hung, trusty blade, while the men-at-arms nodded to one another and said :  
“ There stands a man who knows the use of a weapon. I would that he had the crafty Archbishop before him to practise on.”

When the barrel was trundled in, the Lady of Bernstein had it broached at once, and with her own hand served to each of her men a flagon of the golden wine. Each took his portion, bowing low to the lady, then

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

doffing cap, drank first to the Emperor, and after, with an enthusiasm absent from the Imperial toast, to the young war lord whom the night had flung thus unexpectedly among them. When the last man had refreshed himself, the Count stepped forward and begged a flagon full that he might drink in such good company, and it seemed that Brunhilda had anticipated such a request, for she turned to one of her women and held out her hand, receiving a huge silver goblet marvellously engraved that had belonged to her forefathers, and plenishing it, she gave it to the Count, who, holding it aloft, cried, "The Lady of Bernstein," whereupon there arose such a shout that the troubled Archbishop heard it in his distant tent.

"And yet further of your hospitality must I crave," said Konrad, "for the morning air is keen, and

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

gives me an appetite for food of which I am deeply ashamed, but which nevertheless clamours for an early breakfast."

The Lady, after giving instruction to the maids who waited upon her, led the way into the castle, where Konrad following, they arrived in the long Rittersaal, at the end of which, facing the brightening east, was placed a huge window of stained glass, whose great breadth was gradually lightening as if an unseen painter with magic brush was tinting the glass with transparent colour, from the lofty timbered ceiling to the smoothly polished floor. At the end of the table, with her back to the window, Brunhilda sat, while the Count took a place near her, by the side, turning so that he faced her, the ever-increasing radiance illumining his scintillating armour. The girl ate sparingly, saying little and glancing often at

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

her guest. He fell to, like the good trencherman he was, and talked unceasingly of the wars in the East, and the brave deeds done there, and as he talked the girl forgot all else, rested her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands, regarding him intently, for he spoke not of himself but of her brother, and of how, when grievously pressed, he had borne himself so nobly that more than once, seemingly certain defeat was changed into glorious victory. Now and then when Konrad gazed upon Brunhilda, his eloquent tongue faltered for a moment and he lost the thread of his narrative, for all trace of the warrior maid had departed, and there, outlined against the glowing window of dazzling colours, she seemed indeed a saint with her halo of golden hair, a fit companion to the angels that the marvellous skill of the artificer had placed in that gorgeous

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

collection of pictured panes, lead-lined and cut in various shapes, answering the needs of their gifted designer, as a paint-brush follows the will of the artist. From where the young man sat, the girl against the window seemed a member of that radiant company, and thus he paused stricken speechless by her beauty.

She spoke at last, the smile on her lips saddened by the down turning of their corners, her voice the voice of one hovering uncertain between laughter and tears.

"And you," she said, "you seem to have had no part in all this stirring recital. It was my brother and my brother and my brother, and to hear you one would think you were all the while hunting peacefully in your Rhine forests. Yet still I do believe the Count of Hochstaden gave the heathen to know he was somewhat further to the east of Germany."



---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

“Oh, of me,” stammered the Count. “Yes, I was there, it is true, and sometimes — well, I have a fool of a captain, headstrong and reckless, who swept me now and then into a mêlée, before I could bring cool investigation to bear upon his mad projects, and once in the fray of course I had to plead with my sword to protect my head, otherwise my bones would now be on the desert sands, so I selfishly lay about me and did what I could to get once more out of the turmoil.”

The rising sun now struck living colour into the great window of stained glass, splashing the floor and the further wall with crimson and blue and gold. Count Konrad sprang to his feet. “The day is here,” he cried, standing in the glory of it, while the girl rose more slowly. “Let us have in your bugler and see if he has forgotten the battle call of

[ III ]

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

the Bernsteins. Often have I heard it in the desert. 'Give us the battle call,' young Heinrich would cry, and then to its music all his followers would shout 'Bernstein! Bernstein!' until it seemed the far-off horizon must have heard."

The trumpeter came, and being now well fed, blew valiantly, giving to the echoing roof the war cry of the generations of fighting men it had sheltered.

"That is it," cried the Count, "and it has a double significance. A challenge on the field, and a summons to parley when heard from the walls. We shall now learn whether or no the Archbishop has forgotten it, and I crave your permission to act as spokesman with his Lordship."

"That I most gratefully grant," said the Lady of the Castle.

Once more on the battlements, the Lord of Hochstaden commanded

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

the trumpeter to sound the call. The martial music rang out in the still morning air and was echoed mockingly by the hills on the other side of the river. After that, all was deep silence.

"Once again," said Konrad.

For a second time the battle blast filled the valley, and for a second time returned faintly back from the hills. Then from near the great tent of the Archbishop, by the margin of the stream, came the answering call, accepting the demand for a parley.

When at last the Archbishop, mounted on a black charger, came slowly up the winding path which led to the castle, attended by only two of his officers, he found the Count of Hochstaden awaiting him on the battlements above the gate. The latter's hopes arose when he saw that Cologne himself had come, and

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

had not entrusted the business to an envoy, and it was also encouraging to note that he came so poorly attended, for when a man has made up his mind to succumb he wishes as few witnesses as possible, while if he intends further hostilities, he comes in all the pomp of his station.

"With whom am I to hold converse?" began the Archbishop; "I am here at the behest of the Bernstein call to parley, but I see none of that name on the wall to greet me."

"Heinrich, Baron Bernstein, is now on his way to his castle from the Holy Land, and were he here it were useless for me to summon a parley, for he would answer you with the sword and not with the tongue when he learned his father was dead at your hand."

"That is no reply to my question. With whom do I hold converse?"

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

"I am Konrad, Count of Hochstaden, and your Lordship's vassal."

"I am glad to learn of your humility and pleased to know that I need not call your vassalage to your memory, but I fear that in the darkness you have less regard for either than you now pretend in the light of day."

"In truth, my Lord, you grievously mistake me, for in the darkness I stood your friend. I assure you I had less than a thousand rascals at my back last night, and yet nothing would appease them but that they must fling themselves upon your whole force, had I not held them in check. I told them you probably outnumbered us ten to one, but they held that one man who had gone through an eastern campaign was worth ten honest burghers from Cologne, which indeed I verily believe, and for the fact that you were not

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

swept into the Rhine early this morning you have me and my peaceful nature to thank, my Lord. Perhaps you heard the rogues discussing the matter with me before dawn, and going angrily home when I so ordered them."

"A man had need to be dead and exceedingly deep in his grave not to have heard them," growled the Archbishop.

"And there they stand at this moment, my Lord, doubtless grumbling among themselves that I am so long giving the signal they expect, which will permit them to finish this morning's work. The men I can generally control, but my captains are a set of impious cut-throats who would sooner sack an Archbishop's palace than listen to the niceties of the feudal law which protects over-lords from such pleasantries."

The Archbishop turned on his  
[ 116 ]

---

## COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

horse and gazed on the huge bulk of Schloss Hochstaden, and there a wonderful sight met his eye. The walls bristled with armed men, the sun glistening on their polished breastplates like the shimmer of summer lightning. The Archbishop turned toward the gate again, as though the sight he beheld brought small comfort to him.

“What is your desire?” he said with less of truculence in his tone than there had been at the beginning.

“I hold it a scandal,” said the Count gravely, “that a prince of the Church should assault Christian walls while their owner is absent in the East venturing his life in the uplifting of the true faith. You can now retreat without loss of prestige; six hours hence that may be impossible. I ask you then to give your assurance to the Lady of Bernstein, pledging your knightly word that





---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

deeply that the Count still held her hand, but she did not withdraw it.

“And now, my Lord Archbishop, that this long-held contention is amicably adjusted,” began Von Hochstaden, “I crave that you bestow on us two your gracious blessing, potentate of the Church, for this lady is to be my wife.”

“What !” cried Brunhilda in sudden anger, snatching her hand from his, “do you think you can carry me by storm as you did my castle, without even asking my consent ?”

“Lady of my heart,” said Konrad tenderly, “I did ask your consent. My eyes questioned in the Rittersaal and yours gave kindly answer. Is there then no language but that which is spoken ? I offer you here before the world my open hand ; is it to remain empty ?”

He stood before her with outstretched palm, and she gazed stead-

---

COUNT KONRAD'S COURTSHIP

---

fastly at him, breathing quickly. At length a smile dissolved the sternness of her charming lips, she glanced at his extended hand and said :

“ ’T were a pity so firm and generous a hand should remain tenantless,” and with that she placed her palm in his.

The Archbishop smiled grimly at this lovers’ by-play, then solemnly, with upraised hands, invoked God’s blessing upon them.











